CHAPTER 1

Prologue

It was only after I had moved away from Kokomo that I became aware that I had never heard the origin of the name of the creek that ran near our house: the Wildcat. I presume it was because at some earlier time wildcats were to be seen in that region. But I never saw or heard of one during the first 14 years of my life there from 1919-1933. The creek played an important role in our lives (I was the youngest of ten children), mainly as a source of recreation but at least three times in near tragedy. But I'm getting ahead of my story. It was only by telling my own six children the stories and events of my childhood that it was brought home to me how times have changed. People talk of generation changes but it isn't until the time span approaches 60-70 years that the early period becomes so unique.

I had not thought about putting this past and its changes down on paper until the next to last of my seven brothers died. I realized that I was rapidly becoming unable to get confirmation or insight into my own memories. My only surviving brother was only four years older than I and because he had gone into the seminary at 16 his memory of this past was somewhat limited and unreliable. I had a still living 96 year old sister but her memory of most things had long since diminished. Wildcat creek: names back then were usually descriptive of the person or place. Hardebeck's Crossing had an obvious meaning: it was where that particular road crossed the main road in that area, next to the Hardebeck farm. Nicknames carried the same kind of information. Bony, Meaty; and Simp meant what they implied: three fellows who were skinny, fat and not very bright; Deadeye had a clear connection too, much out of place in this present world of correct speech: Mancel, the boy's real name, had only one eye. Fontaine Fox, the premier cartoonist for the Chicago Tribune during that period built his reputation on a cast of characters in his strip "Toonerville Trolley" that in this day's climate of political correctness would be impossible to create: Aunt Eppie Hogg (fattest woman in three counties); "Skyscraper" Smith and "Suitcase" Simpson; "Wisecracker" Wortle, "Snake Tongue" Tompkins; "Flytrap" Finnegan; "Chew" Wilson, the 2-Quid man; "Pegleg" Sanders, "Hee-Haw" Hoskins, "Bony Bertha"; "Stinky" Davis, "Knobhead" Newsome. I grew up in an era when language conveyed much secondary information.

Kokomo was a town of about 30,000 in the 1920's, a fairly big city in Indiana where only one

city, Indianapolis was over 100,000 and five others in- between. Kokomo was named after a Miami Tribe Indian chief named Kokomoah, or as some later spelling gave as Makokomo. He was buried in the Indian cemetery near where my fraternal grandmother lived. Kokomo was an odd sort of town, about as hickish as one could be, yet it proudly proclaimed itself as “The City of Firsts”, with good reason. I remember reading a national magazine article about Kokomo and its claim as a city of firsts. Most of these claims had to do with early inventions related to the automobile industry. At one time in the early 1900's Kokomo factories built three different makes of commercial automobiles. To name a few firsts: in 1894 Elwood Haynes built and tested the first commercial automobile on what is still called the Pumpkinvine Pike. That same year D.C. Speaker built the first pneumatic tire. George Kingston in 1902 built the first carburetor. In 1895 William Johnson made the first Aluminum casting and in 1912 Elwood Haynes, the auto pioneer invented the first stainless steel. It was a true industrial town, its growth fed by the discovery of natural gas which provided a cheap form of energy and lighting for various commercial processes. My mother told me that right after her marriage in 1896 they rented a “company” house (Pittsburg Plate Glass) for $2/month. That charge included natural gas for heating and lighting.

Our family lived on the very edge of town, a few blocks from the Pittsburg Plate Glass factory that employed, at its peak, over 5,000 workers. Most of these workers were from “the old country”, the term applied to anyone who had migrated from Europe. My father was one of these, having his passage paid in 1892 by Pittsburg Plate Glass. He was 20 years old. That period in US history was one of rapid industrial expansion and the labor supply, especially skilled labor required for glass making, led companies to recruit in Europe with benefit packages that included the cost of the ocean passage. Probably 90% of the families in our neighborhood, defined roughly as the ten blocks adjacent to the Plate Glass factory itself were first generation from Europe, most having come in the period of 1890-1910. They were Germans as we were, Rumanians, Italians, English, Russian, French, and Swiss. What I would call the native Americans in our neighborhood were mostly black, with a lesser number of white southerners who all seemed to have come from a small mountain region in Tennessee with the town name of Bull’s Gap.

Surprisingly there were essentially no racial conflicts. Perhaps because all families seemed to want to work for a better life there was broad tolerance for ethnic differences. There was a fair level

of violence, but contrary to today's experience it was directed mostly "within house" and it was always obvious why the violence took place. A man killed his wife because she was having an affair. A negro slashed and killed another negro because of an argument over a girl. No one ever locked their doors and so far as I can recall there was never any fear that violence would be directed toward our family. There was "concern" at one point when the KKK was quite active but this risk was treated more as a joke than real. The common bond was not religion since no single one dominated, but a common heritage covered by the term "pioneer". There was much sharing between families: telephones were scarce so one used the neighbor's phone. Food, while not scarce, was a staple that often was shared across families. If a pig was butchered many families became involved. During the depression gifts of clothing and loaning of money to the poorer neighbor was a common occurrence. I recall two instances involving a particular black family that lived behind us. In one Missus McClain, the grandmother, gave my mother a dollar. But my mother couldn't understand what prompted this until she was reminded that she had "loaned" Missus McClain a dollar over a year ago. I was there when the repayment was made. Another time involved the gift of a mackinaw coat that had been passed down through our family from brothers Lewie, Willie, Duck, Mick and myself. I still loved that coat and hadn't realized that my mother had finally passed it on to the McClain family who had two boys about my age. I showed enough upset that my mother "bought" the coat back for $5.00.

It was accepted practice that anyone seen eating anything was subject to a sharing call. If you were seen leaving the house eating an apple, and someone yelled "cobs" or "bites" you had to share the apple in that fashion. Only if you had the presence of mind to yell "No cobs, no bites, no nothins" were you assured that you could eat the whole apple. Other rules involved the start of games which invariably involved a rank ordering of choices. Whoever had the first thought of a game would yell "pickers up", followed quickly by someone else yelling "holders", followed in turn by "first", Second", "third" etc. These calls all involved the order in which each person would try to guess which hand held the hidden stone. The last one became "it" in games that involved one person against the rest. Choosing up sides in team sports was again a fair process with two captains choosing his team members one by alternate one. First choice for a baseball side was made by tossing a bat, having it caught somewhere on the handle, and the two captains alternating "grips" until the last person who could grip the bat got first choice. If he was challenged by the other person,

that person, with a less than full grip, had to be able to toss the bat at least ten bat lengths to win first choice.

CHAPTER 2

Earliest Memories

Most writers about earliest memories say that these are unreliable before the age of about three. My own daughter claims, and I believe her, of having a clear recall of the move into our new house when she was 16 months old. My own clear memory starts about that same age. I was just learning to talk, the youngest of ten children, and had one brother four years older than I, but nearest in age to me who was named Herman (he is the one who I'll later call "Mick" since that was the nickname he carried most of his life. The next brother in line was Albert (who will later in this narrative be called by his nickname "Duck"). I remember distinctly calling my brother Albert: "Oppie" and my brother Herman: "Ommie". This apparently was the closest pronunciation I could make of their correct names. About this time our mailman, Ben Baughman, left the route. He was a close family friend although he did not live nearby. He drove a mailcart, pulled by a horse who automatically knew all the proper house stops. Ben would often come inside to chat, especially if he had just delivered a letter or package from Germany. He took special interest in me and I didn't realize till many years later that he had a young son about my age. When he stopped delivering the mail the reason in my young mind at about two was that a man wearing a long raincoat had approached him, shined a flashlight on him, and two others carried him away. It wasn't until I was much older that I realized that Ben had taken ill and had to take a protracted time off.

I have no memory of my father who died when I was two years old in the tail end of the flu epidemic in 1922. From 1918 to 1922 over one million people died from the flu in the United States, and over ten million worldwide. But about two months after his death my mother, with me and my brother Duck who was eight at the time, went by train to visit a distant relative in Rochester, N.Y. For some reason she did not take my brother Mick who was six at the time. I remember detail from that trip as if it was yesterday. I remember sitting on the back step of the relative's house and blowing a harmonica. I remember being on that same step when I was warned about a balloon that I was trying to suck in to make a bubble that I should not do that because a little boy like me had choked to death. I remember at that same time being given a toy monkey that could climb up a string as it was pulled. But my most vivid memory was of a visit to an amusement park where a bicyclist

while attempting to do a loop-de-loop on a platform as high as a roller coaster, fell.

I remember visiting the crocodile cage and being warned by my mother not to put my fingers through the bars. And about that same instant I lost a balloon that I was carrying and as it drifted up into the sky I still remember, in German, my mother's comment that it would come down "im wald" (in the woods). That same amusement park also had a penny arcade. A penny arcade, for the benefit of younger readers, was a large room that had all sorts of contraptions that operated if one inserted a penny in the slot; somewhat similar to present day mall amusement parlors The only device I remember from that visit (remember I was only two and one years old) was one that immediately after inserting a coin suddenly opened a small door and out popped a boxing glove that would smack you wherever your body was in line. For me that was my head. I carried that puzzling memory for over sixty years until one day I thought to ask my brother Duck if he remembered the trip (he was six years older than I, so he was about eight at the time). He said that he did. When I asked him if he remembered the penny arcade he smiled. And when I asked did he remember the machine that threw out the boxing glove. He did. What was that all about? It didn't make any sense to me. Then he gave me the longest delayed punch line in history. The flying boxing glove answered the come-on question on the front of the machine: "See how Cleopatra died!" Of course at two I had no clue as to who Cleopatra was.

One of the early pleasures my mother permitted was for me to accompany my older brothers to the movies. A high percentage of those were cowboy movies, and I recall that I thought all the action was live, being viewed through the opening in the front of the theater. The cowboys were riding their horses in a field behind the screen opening. There were many other early memories that I will recount as they more naturally fit into later portions of this story.

CHAPTER 3

Family Background

Both of my parents were born in Germany near the town of Mannheim. They had attended the same grade school but did not really know each other until both had migrated to the United States in the early 1890's. My father, who went by the name Joseph (I learned much later that he had

been baptized Franz Joseph, apparently named after the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph. He had apparently dropped the first name to help avoid tracing his roots back to Germany after "dodging the draft" and going to the United States. Joseph worked in a glass factory in Mannheim and did not relish the prospect of serving the compulsory two years in the German army at age 18. So when the Pittsburgh Plate Glass came recruiting workers for their plants in the US he took the offer of free passage and went to work in the PPG factory in Kokomo, Indiana. That plant employed over 5000 workers and provided the livelihood for most of the adult males in that town of less than 30,000. Within a few years my father paid passage for his parents and younger brother Charles (called "Chink") who came to live with him in Kokomo.

About that time his mother Caroline became ill and Joseph searched for some live-in help to care for her. That is where my mother, who became Joseph's wife entered the picture. My mother, born Ida Liebich was from a strict Catholic family, especially her father. She told me later that he would beat her if she could not repeat, almost verbatim, the priest's Sunday sermon. My mother's mother died in childbirth when my mother was about six: the three surviving children were each taken in and cared for by one of their mother's brothers (family name Hahn). My mother's father remarried within one year and my mother (with a push from her father) entered a convent in Strassburg at about age 17 to study to be a nun in one of North Africa's German colonies. In preparation for that role she learned to speak Swahili, the native African language of the colony. She could still speak the tongue when I was a child. Her brother Nicholaus entered the Benedictine Seminary to study for the priesthood at age fourteen but had to leave after about ten years due to health problems.

My mother stayed in the convent for a year and a half and decided that she did not want to be a nun. When she told her father of this decision he became so angry that he ordered her to leave the house and that he never wanted to see her again: she had disgraced the family! My mother spent the next year wandering Europe, working at housekeeping jobs until she could earn enough money to pay for boat passage to the United States. She came to the US in 1896 on the steamer Zeebrugge out of Antwerp, Belgium. She had an uncle, last name Hahn, who lived in Cincinnati at that time and if necessary she would go to him. He was her mother's brother who had cared for her after her own mother died and her father was in process of remarrying. She never saw or heard from her father

again. He died November 28, 1918, just as World War I ended. She returned to Germany for three months visit in 1928 with remaining relatives, and visited his grave. Her sister Magdalena about 1900 married Wilhelm Brohmann and had three children whom my mother brought to the United States in 1923, a year after my father had died. Their mother also had died in childbirth in 1909 when the children were ages 2, 4, and 7. Their father had remarried about 1917 and had one son Willi, born in 1919. Post World War I most of Germany was starving and when the father was stealing food from a warehouse he was shot and killed by a security guard. It was shortly thereafter, in 1923, that my mother brought the three children: Mary, age 16; Franz (Frank) age 18, and Ludwig (Louie) age 20 to live with us in Kokomo.

On the boat trip over my mother had met a doctor and his wife who offered her work as a housekeeper for their family in New Jersey. She worked there for a few months when she received a letter from my father. He had heard that she had come to the states and he was in need of a live-in housekeeper to take care of his mother. According to the family story, his mother had to jump off the rail trestle crossing the Wildcat creek when a train was coming and she had mental problems afterwards. Father Lordemann, the local catholic priest at St. Patricks, knew the family, and according to my mother, suggested to her that it was somewhat improper for a young girl to be living in the same house with a young man her own age; so why didn't they get married. She moved out temporarily to live with the O'Donnell family nearby and married my father in 1897. Interestingly, a son in that O'Donnell family later became a Holy Cross priest and the President of Notre Dame: Fr. Charles O'DONNELL. And it was through that connection that my brother Mick (Herman) also became a Holy Cross priest at Notre Dame, and I, through financial assistance steered my way through Fr. O'Donnell was later able to attend the same university.

CHAPTER 4

The Neighborhood

Our house at 1412 Vaile Avenue was the last house on that side of the street before leaving the city limits. Until about 1920 the Wildcat Creek flowed within 100 feet of our property, through an area called the Driving Park. I suppose it got that name from the fact that a dirt track for racing cars occupied a large section of the area, which was roughly a circular tract about one mile in diameter. Car racing was a major sport in the Indiana in those days, and fifty miles away in

Indianapolis was the site of the famous Indy 500 racetrack. While the dirt race track in the Driving Park still operated some of the most famous drivers of that era raced there. Barney Oldfield and Eddie Rickenbacker were two names that always came up in conversation. It was apparently from his skills as a race car driver that Eddie Rickenbacker made the transition to fighter pilot and was credited with the most (25) German planes shot down by a U.S. airman in WW I.

When that entire Driving Park area was bought by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass as a settling area for the sand slurry used to polish the large glass castings the Wildcat creek was rerouted from below our house to a point about one half mile away and that new section of the creek became known as "The Channel". Before buying the Driving Park, PPG had already filled an area about half that size about a mile away, and soon began the process of depositing the solids from what to the eye and hand was little different than a stream of muddy water. But the almost constant flow of that slurry gradually filled the new area so that by the time in 1933 that the PPG had stopped making glass in Kokomo (the depression shut down the entire plant) a perfectly flat sand surface had gradually risen to a depth of about 30 feet. The surface solid was so fine that any strong wind would blow some of it into the air, in a fashion similar to the dust storms that were common in the southwest about that time. By today's environmental standards that sand field, as it was called, would be high on the list of complaints. By the time that the PPG had stopped its glass making operations about 1933 that entire Driving Park area was filled almost to the adjacent roadway level. It is difficult to comprehend the solid filled volume of both of those areas which each had a depth of about 30 feet. The sand had essentially no solid nutrients so for at least 15 years practically nothing would grow there. Because of that it made a beautiful layout for any sport requiring a flat surface: golf, baseball etc. In later years the sand field as we called it was able to support vegetation and was eventually bought by the County for a public park.

Our immediate neighbors on our side of the street, in order of housing were a Romanians family, an Italian family, a Russian family, two native white American families and an English family. The English family named Critchley had 13 children, ten of whom were boys. They actually had their own cricket and baseball teams and two the boys were good enough to play AAA baseball. George, the youngest, was a pitcher and was the one who taught my brother Mick to pitch. Across the street, without giving any order lived a Romanian family, a negro family, two white American families and a German family. Behind us lived another black family, a Belgian, a Romanian and an Italian. Whenever I use ethnic terms the parents in all of those families were first generation

Americans from “the old country”. A similar ethnic mix pattern was followed in all the areas adjacent to our house.

There was a building next to our house that everyone called “the bunk house” which was just that. It was owned by the PPG and served initially to house some of its workers. Later, after PPG closed, it rented rooms to others. It had about six rooms, with no running water or toilet facilities, not even an outhouse, which was common in those days. Its tenants changed frequently and were a mixture of poor black and white. I use the term poor rather loosely since almost every family in our neighborhood, by today’s standards, would be called poor. But the bunk house tenants were poorer. In my memory it had three famous tenants: Frank Thompson, a single black man aged about forty who’s fame was that he caught snapping turtles with his hands. The procedure was called “feeling for turtles” and he taught my brother Emil how to do it. In turn that art was passed on to several other of my brothers but stopped before it got to me. The second character I remember was Ben “Chic” Sales. Ben also was a bachelor, white, and supposedly had come to Kokomo by bicycle from New York. During the several years that I knew him he “lived on the county”. That meant that he did odd jobs for his food and some money. And how did he get to work? He drove a 1928 Stearns-Knight which originally was one of the most expensive cars built. Ben told me the original price was $8,000. which in today’s terms would put it in the Rolls Royce class. It was about three years old at that point, in the middle of the depression, and Ben said he bought it for $50. It had side curtains that rolled up and down, a glass partition and speaking tube between the chauffeur and its occupant, obviously built for luxury. When Ben started up that 12 cylinder engine in the morning you could hear the roar for blocks.

The third tenant I remember was actually a church, with all black members. There was a hand painted sign over the door which read:” Church of God of the Apostolic Faith: Saints Home and Farm.” The pastor was a man who rode up on a bicycle for the scheduled services. I never knew his name but everyone called him “High Pockets” since he wore suspenders which seemed to lift his waist near his neck. The services were typical Gospel type, with much singing. The strange thing, for me, was that the only music was provided by drums and tambourines. Actually the building was unoccupied for most of the years that I remember. It had an abandoned gas well within 10 feet of the building, with an open pipe about nine inches in diameter. We used to lower a can on a string for about 600 feet and retrieve oil, and I always wondered if someone should not have tried to get that

oil out. But in those days natural gas was the primary fuel for heating and lighting, and dry gas wells were abandoned. In memory I am surprised that it was never capped, to prevent small children from falling into it.

There were few cars in those days and I remember the first one our family bought, a 1924 Dodge touring car that was advertised as the "fastest four on wheels". It was open on the sides, with "side curtains" that were stored under the back seat and you would install the curtains if it started to rain. This maneuver involved stopping the car, removing the back seat and mounting the side curtains on rods. The curtains were made of canvas, with see-thru panels of plastic which I guess may have been celluloid, the same plastic used for motion picture film. Needless to say they didn't keep out a hard rain nor the cold of winter. Those cars had to be hand cranked and I remember several broken arms from "kickback" as the engine reversed direction. The most common accident however was to try to crank the car when the temperature was below freezing and one's hand would freeze onto the metal crank handle, resulting in lost flesh.

The car truly was a family purchase since each member had to contribute. My share was two gold $2.50 gold coins that had been given to me by my cousin Frank Brohman, one of the siblings my mother had brought from Germany. I don't recall how the car privileges were divided but probably there were only four drivers of age to drive at that time. As I recall the car was used mostly to drive to and from work or visit friends. I do recall that most trips over 30 miles involved a puncture which had to be patched on the spot. I also recall that after we sold that car it was spotted with the same U.S. Royal tires that had run over 2,000 miles. Everyone thought that was remarkable!

Most commercial vending was still done by horse drawn wagons. The mailman had his horse but that was unusual since most mailmen walked. The ice was delivered by horse drawn wagon. "Buttermilk Charley" had a horse cart, as did the junk man. I can still hear his repeated call: "Any old rags, old iron, old paper, old....", and Tony the ice cream vendor. There was a neighbor whose name I do not remember who would be seen daily driving a small horse drawn wagon which for some reason always invited a neighborhood chant by whatever group of kids happened to be watching him go by. There were two different yells and only two: "He eats soap to keep out of the Army!" and a nonsense yell: "Big eyed rabbit! Zoop! Zoop!". He never got off the wagon to chase

kids for the simple reason that he could not have caught them and someone might drive away with his horse!

Those were the days when car salesmen came to your house to try to make a sale. In fact because so few people had convenient transportation much selling was door to door. The insurance man came every week to collect his fifty cents premium. The Fuller Brush man to sell his wares, the tea salesman. The main means of transportation for the young was on foot or by bicycle and there was reason to learn to ride early. Since all bikes were 28" it made it difficult for a five year old so it was common, as I learned to do, was to ride with your legs under the bar. It looked funny but it worked. It also was common to ride double and triple on the bike; the second person sitting on the bar and the third, usually a smaller brother like me, riding on the handlebar. I recall that salesmen for the "Star" car would drive through the neighborhood with only three wheels mounted on the car to show how stable it was. I remember a particular salesman bragging that an Oakland could be driven 55 mph all day without harming the engine and that blather quickly lost him a sale. I remember driving "wide open", the term used for driving as fast as one could and glancing with apprehension at the speedometer as brother Willie "floored it" and got up to 69 mph. Most cars of that vintage had separate handles for "spark" and "gas" mounted at the steering wheel and going all out had the added attraction of watching the driver pull both levers down to max.. The Model T Ford which was most common had the characteristic that it had more power in reverse than in forward drive, and it was common to see someone backing up a steep hill.

Winter or wet weather driving were particularly hazardous. In winter there was no defrost system in any car and I remember the many times watching my brothers light matches against the windshield to create a small hole for vision. Some cars had heaters but a requirement for most drivers was a set of "driving gloves" which were heavy leather gloves that came almost up to the elbow. The windshield wipers were operated on vacuum and in wet weather they would slow down when one needed them the most. These were car hazards of driving, but the highest risk was to hit "fresh gravel" on a country road. I recall several entire families being killed from that kind of accident. While there were not that many cars on the road it was a period that invited races down dirt roads with someone you had never seen before, who wanted to showoff the speed of his new car. The invariable call of the faster driver was "Eat my dust!" and that was aptly descriptive.

It was a time when airplanes were uncommon but it was a common occurrence that when an occasional plane flew over our chickens would scurry for cover. I suppose instinct suggested that there was a giant hawk about to swoop down. Speaking of airplanes I still remember seeing Charles Lindbergh flying overhead in the Spirit of St. Louis, shortly after his historic flight to Paris in 1927. I remember too seeing an "autogyro" which was like present helicopters except it also had a single wing. Also there was a farmer just north of town who owned and operated his own airport south of town. Every afternoon, just before dark, you could see his plane overhead heading for home, where he would land in his own field. During World War II Shockley headed, as a General, the entire landing of towed gliders in Normandy on D-Day.

CHAPTER 5

Old Jasper

For some reason, people who became neighborhood "characters" and were elderly invariably had the adjective "old" associated with their name: Old Jasper, Old Man Dan, Old Greasy Hog etc.. Old Jasper, whose full name was Jasper Disier, was a Swiss immigrant who had come to the U.S. in the same wave of immigration that brought my father to Kokomo to work in the PPG glass factory in the 1890's. When I first came to know him he had been retired from PPG for health reasons after working there for about 30 years. He was a bachelor but actually lived with his uncle whom he had brought over to the States. His uncle was always called "Old Man Dan" and I never recall speaking to him. I would see him almost daily with a scoop and broom, collecting horse manure which could be found in the streets. I presume the manure was used as fertilizer. Old Man Dan had one leg shorter than the other and wore a built up shoe with a sole about 4" thick. After the movie Frankenstein was produced the character Igor, dragging his foot as he walked reminded me of Old Man Dan. But it was Jasper who was the character.

Jasper lived in a cinder block house that he said (and everyone said it was true) was built in two days with help from his uncle. The cinder blocks were an invention of Jasper himself, and I have never heard or read anything to the contrary. As residue from its furnaces used for glass making the PPG had an endless supply of cinders, which dumped on "the dump" site which it owned. The dump was across the road (a cinder road) from Jasper's house, as were most roads in our neighborhood.

Jasper used these same cinders, which obviously were free, mixed with some Portland cement to cast individual cinder blocks. These blocks were piled high behind his house and were the source of the blocks he had used to build not only his own house but a second one next door. That house next door, for all the years I lived there, was rented to a black family.

Jasper was about 5'8'' and made a sharp contrast to his uncle who was about 6'2". Jasper always wore the same baggy pants that never seemed to have been washed, supported by one suspender cut from an inner tube of a tire. He almost always wore a hat and chewed tobacco and I can still see the tobacco stain and smell the odor that came from his brown stained mustache. He wore glasses but that did not hide the fact that he had two different colored eyes. His one natural left eye was grey but the right eye, which he had lost in an accident, had its empty socket filled with a brown glass eye that he had found on the dump. Much of his house and its furnishings had been retrieved from the dump, including the slate roof on his house. The house had an open front porch, its roof supported by several natural posts which had been trunks of small trees without the bark.

Jasper was an excellent craftsman, though he had no power tools. He carved loose jointed dolls out of wood, about 18" high, using the dolls to perform dances as he suspended them from the ceiling with their feet resting on a paddle board which he held between his legs. The paddle had a “dance floor” about 10 by 10 inches and was made to bounce as Jasper struck the neck of the board. These dances were always accompanied by music, as Jasper blew on a harmonica held in his mouth by a frame and a small concertina which he played with one hand, the other end of the concertina held in place on his leg. As children he was always delighted to have visitors and would almost always bring out the dancing doll if asked. At one point one of my older brothers took Jasper to a Knights of Columbus meeting where he put on his show.

Jasper had hunted as a boy in the Swiss Alps and it was there that he had lost his eye. He had been poaching game, mountain goats, when a game warden suddenly appeared. Jasper had quickly thrown his rifle in a near bush to hide it and was not arrested since he had no apparent weapon. The next day when he went back to retrieve the gun it discharged, hitting him in the eye. He used to make bows and arrows and one of his proudest stories was the time he had shot and pinned a rat to the wall. That event was before my time but my older brothers had actually seen the rat, still pinned

to the wall several days later.

Jasper at one time had a pet crow which would follow him around and occasionally came to our house where he proceeded to pull the clothespins off the line and take them back home. For some reason crows like to gather trinkets and bright baubles and along with the clothes pins one would could find small colored stones and pieces of glass in its nest on the ground. Jasper also had a pet possum which used to sleep with him. All the neighbors of course knew about this but it came as a shock when the parish priest, on one of annual visits to those whom he felt were neglecting their "Easter duty" found Jasper, sick in bed, with his possum.

Jasper also occasionally raised goats and this one spring the nanny had given birth to a pure white kid. Jasper announced the arrival to his neighbors but the next day came running to our house to announce the kid had been bewitched: what had been a white goat had suddenly turned jet black. My sister Rose went back to the house with him to calm him down and discovered that now there were two kids with the nanny: one white and the other black. Apparently the second kid arrived a day later.

Jasper was always ready to tell tales and stories of his youth and invariably would bring out his pocket watch which had within the case a small stone. Jasper said the stone permitted him to distinguish male and female by which direction the watch would swing. He would confirm its powers by holding it over the head of the boy or girl in his audience. And he would top off its magic by having us expose the leather soles of our shoes and he would proceed to identify whether they had come from a cow or a bull.

Jasper was often the butt of the older children's pranks and invariably, every year at Halloween, they would overturn his privy (he had no indoor plumbing). This prank continued for several years until Jasper finally solved the problem. He built the next privy around a live tree, its trunk being about six inches in diameter. The still live tree emerged from the top of the privy and was always regarded as one of Jasper's great creations. Needless to say there were no more overturned privies.

Whenever any game was killed Jasper would always accept the offer of a free carcass, invariably tanning the skin to sell. As I recall, most of what he was given would go into soup which he always called, in his french accent, bouillon. I know he ate coon and possum which no one in my family would eat. I remember once he accepted an eel we had caught, which made a most tasty dish he said. And he used the tanned skin to make a belt. There is another most interesting story about Jasper that I will include in the chapter titled: “Near Tragedy in the Neighborhood”.

CHAPTER 6

Neighborhood Games

There were daylight games and night time games. Because there were seven boys in a row in our family, covering a sixteen year span, our house was the center attraction for a large group of friends. There was no sharp age division in activities and many of the games ignored age entirely. The bigger boys would challenge four of the younger kids to a wrestling match and it was surprising how even a match that was. Since I was the youngest boy in the group I quickly developed an ability to handle myself physically. It led for example to my getting in a fight the very first day of first grade with every other boy in my class which totaled six boys. Our neighborhood was literally “on the other side of the tracks” and I can remember that the girl friend of my oldest brother Karl was somewhat afraid to come into the neighborhood.

Many of the “special” games were to take advantage of ignorant first time visitors, who would come from other neighborhoods to play with friends they knew from school. The classic game was called a snipe hunt which was talked up for days in school before the trap was sprung. A snipe hunt was a hunt for a supposedly real animal, described as somewhat like a medium sized bird that almost never flew. The hunt was always done at night, in the woods which were about a mile outside city limits, in the countryside (no houses within a mile). Those in on the know would give the dupe a gunny sack which he was to hold open while the rest of the group which usually numbered about 8-10 would fan out through the woods and on signal would start herding the snipe toward the gunny sack. I don’t recall what instructions were given for how to get the snipe into the sack; it was understood that they would find their way in somehow. A typical snipe hunt might start about eight o’clock in the summer evening, just as it was getting dark and those in the know would

immediately head for home after leaving the guy “holding the bag”. He would wait in the woods sometimes for several hours before deciding at some point he had been tricked and would have to find his way out of an unfamiliar woods in pitch darkness. Obviously that game could be played only once on a particular dumbo.

Another game, played with the unknowledgeable new visitors was Pee-Wee-More. In those days all the boys wore caps and a cap was an essential part of this game. I don’t recall all the pre-directions for the game but the leader had everyone place their caps in a row and then go and hide. A few minutes later the leader would yell “Pee-Wee-More” and everyone was supposed to rush back to get their cap. In the interval between these two events the leader and friends in the know had circled back to where the caps were and at the signal PWM proceeded to urinate in each of the caps of the ignorant members. You can let your imagination take care of the rest.

Another game that required the uninitiated was called “Lame Soldier”. This game was played out with assigned roles: one member was the horse, another the lame soldier and another, the patsy, was the orderly whose job it was to help the lame soldier onto the horse. As the soldiers were scattered around, waiting for the signal call to help the lame soldier he was off somewhere defecating and planting his shoe firmly in the mess. There was a call for help and all gathered around to help the lame soldier. The patsy who was always assigned as the orderly was told to cup his hands and help the lame soldier onto the horse. The rest of the game is obvious. One thing I never thought about until now is what the mother of the lame soldier thought about her son’s stinky shoe. There was a variation on this game called “Catch the Fox” where the leader, playing the role of the fox, proceeded again to defecate and smear the end of a stick, which was supposed to be the fox’s tail, with the results of his evacuation. The rest of the players were to chase the fox and catch him by the tail: the patsy always won this race.

Cards were a common form of amusement and as the youngest brother I learned all the games. One called “muggins” was a variation on cribbage where the game was played in normal fashion...except for the penalties. In the game each player tries to get rid of the cards in his hand. And when someone is totally discarded the game stops and each player is penalized by the number of card points left in his hand. In muggins as we played it, the penalty was a whack on the palm of

the players hand, one for each point. Each player was permitted to whack the difference between his hand and the next poorer hands. The first one out of course got to whack all the other players and so on down to the worst hand. Muggins, like cribbage, is a game of skill and invariably the new player ended up with the worst losing hand. This meant he was wacked on the hand by each of the other players whose score was lower than his. With 6 or 7 players this could easily amount to 50 or more whacks which often sent the patsies home crying. Of course these games were one time events for the patsies but it seemed that a new one came along frequently.

However, the most common card games were poker and blackjack. No one seemed to have money so the games were always played with stick matches in place of coins. Even before I went to first grade I was a constant player in these games with boys who ranged in age from about 10-18. I recall often playing from early morning to early evening without coming in for dinner (in those days the noon meal was always called dinner, which was the principle meal, and the evening meal was called supper).To be ready for anytime a game started I always carried a back pocket full of matches and a poker deck in the other pocket. The matches were always available within my house and the card decks were picked up as needed from behind the local pool hall/barber shop where card gambling went on daily. After a deck became too worn it was discarded and I constantly scrounged for these discards. The only negative remembrance I have from that period was that one day as my brother Mick and I were coming home from a movie I made the mistake of jumping off the side of a hill into a pile of sand about ten feet below. I thought I had been stung by a bee but it was the pile (probably several hundred matches) that ignited in my back pocket. The flame burned through my overalls and gave me a very sore behind for many days. But I must say that I believe my later ability in math was fostered largely by my participation in those early card games. Mom did not seem too concerned that I would spend 4-6 hours at a time gambling with the older boys. In fact she sometimes took me to the Knights of Columbus to play euchre, for prizes, when I was only 6-7 years old. And she occasionally did the same thing with her KaffeeKlatch group when I was about the same age. Being the youngest child she had to take me along if she wanted to go out. I recall one euchre card party at the K of C. where at one table I was playing against Denny Fitzgerald. Denny, who was about 80, was acknowledged to be the best euchre player in the group, winning prizes so often that many thought he cheated in his scoring. This particular hand I had 5 of the 7 heart trumps, from the ace on down, which meant I had to take at least three tricks. I chose to “play alone” which

meant I played without participation by my partner. If “playing alone” you took all five tricks your score was doubled. In euchre the two highest trumps are the two jacks of the same color (red or black), called the right and left bower. If anyone challenged that bid and the challenger took three or more tricks the bidder was “euchred” and his opponent got four points. Now Denny had the missing two bowers and the missing three aces so he felt comfortable. I can still see the look on his face as I, barely able to see over the edge of the table took my three tricks. And because of the challenge I had to take only three tricks which of course I did. Pedro and pinochle were also played about as often in our house as euchre.

Many of the non card games were straight forward games of skill. A favorite game which my cousins had brought over from Germany involved a six inch stick with a cone shape on each end. The object of the game was to hit this piece with your stick, make it fly into the air and then hit it again toward small pits dug into the ground, which were the targets, about 50 feet away. It was similar to golf. Hide and seek was a favorite game for the younger, with each game starting with someone yelling: “Pickers Up”, followed by a second quick response “Holders”, in turn followed by players yelling out in turn: first, second, third etc. I don’t ever remember any serious arguments as to who yelled what first. We all seemed to accept the group judgment as fair. The older boys played “go-sheepy-go” and red light at night which had the same object: the person “it” had to locate and beat the found person back to home base. This game often involved hiding miles away and could involve hours of search.

A game played in both daylight and at night under street lights was “Blackman”. I don’t know the origin of the name of the game but it probably had racial origin, and would probably be a politically incorrect name today. The object of the game was to choose a single person “it” and then define two sides of a large open field or playground as safe lines, similar to two end zones in football. The distance between these goals was usually about 100 feet. The object was for those not “it” to run from one side to the other without being touched by the person who was “it”. The game proceeded as gradually the “it” was able to catch someone, who in turn joined him as being “it”. The game finally ended when the final player was touched by any one of the remaining players who collectively were “it”. It was a fair game since not even the fastest player could holdout forever against the ever increasing number trying to catch him.

Many of the games were played after dark, under a street light, in or near the road itself. “Knock Off Davy” had a pile of 4-5stones at home base which the pitcher who was “it” tried to knock down with an underhand throw of another large stone. Once the pile was down people who were in the field tried to get home without being touched before the pitcher had reassembled the home base pile. “Kick the wicket” was played similar to baseball, with a short stick called a wicket resting on two stones. The “batter” kicked the wicket and attempted to run the bases similar to baseball. The pitcher could tag someone out only after the wicket had been reset. “Piecrust” was played around an electric pole or tree, after two sides had been chosen. The object of this game was for one team to anchor itself around the pole with each member of that side bending over and locking arms around the waist of his partner in front. The other team had its members, one by one, leapfrog over the last member of the other team as far up as he could. No forward movement after this initial leap was permitted. After all members of the second team had leapfrogged in similar fashion the second team tried, by bouncing and shaking, to cave in some member of the first team. Once the break the second team yelled “pie crust” and the team roles were reversed.

CHAPTER 7

In- And Out- House Humor

I remember there was a lot of shared family fun in our house. In retrospect things may not have been that humorous but when you made your own, standards weren’t always high. There was a repeated conversation that someone in our family overheard, I think it was while a neighbor was using our telephone, that went something like this:

“What’d you say?”
“I said the Simmon’s boys told the Gearhart boys to come the tenth and twenty fifth of every month to pay.”
“What’d you say?”
“I said the Simmon’s boys...”
That conversation went on and on and was so funny to members of our family because they knew that the party on the other end was deaf. I probably heard that conversation repeated hundreds of times and recall it still many times a year.

Two favorite tricks pulled on unsuspecting patsies was to, build a cardboard labyrinth that one would encourage the patsy to put to his eye to see the scene. Remember these were the days when much things of interest were viewed at penny arcades by looking through an opening. In this case the opening had been smeared with lampblack which seemed to be found in everybody's house. When the unsuspecting took his look he of course saw nothing, but ended up having a black circle around his eye, without being aware. Everyone in on the joke would of course burst out laughing but the victim had no idea why. There was a similar trick played with lampblack that involved having the person look through a homemade device and blow. This also deposited a ring of lampblack around the eye. Come to think of it I don't recall why every house seemed to have lampblack. I think it may have been used to polish the exterior of black stoves.

There is a somewhat raunchy trick that I remember associating with my brother Willie and his friend Dutch Coady. This involved a carved stick man, about eight inches high, obviously naked inside a barrel. The device was presented to the unsuspecting patsy who obviously was curious as to what was inside the barrel. But when the barrel was raised a string attached to an important part of the male anatomy, with its tip painted red, also raised. I remember kept building those and giving them to friends until mom put her foot down.

Two tricks involved the finger. In one, a small hole was cut in the bottom of a small box whose bottom was lined wit cotton. One smeared a red dye, usually Mercurochrome on one's own finger and stuck it through the hole in the bottom of the box. Then one approached an unsuspecting friend and asked if they wanted to see a cut-off finger. Of course that aroused a lot of interest and then one proceeded to lift the lid of the box and show the bloody finger. It's surprising how often that trick got reactions. The other trick with the finger involved something called the "Monkey Bite". One approached an unsuspecting friend and asked if they wanted a monkey bite. That usually aroused interest and then the joker proceeded to start rubbing the other person's finger with his thumb. Nothing seemed to be happening and usually the victim would laugh as he knew nothing was happening. But after about several minutes the victim became aware, without any advance pain signal, that the joker had rubbed the skin off his finger. It wasn't until later, and especially next day that he realized where his sore finger had come from.

Our house as I've noted was on the edge of town and there were many open fields not far from our neighborhood. During the summer months one particular field became the site for the visiting carnivals. Each carnival came in on a Saturday night (at least after the first one of the season) just after the prior carnival had packed its tents and equipment and left. So there was a carnival in place every night and day of the summer three months. They were all different, though they had essentially all the same attractions. The "Weird people" show, featuring odd people like the bearded lady or the half man, half woman who got close inspection only if you paid an additional charge inside. There was the "Crazy House" with the slanted floors, the unexpected pop-up frights, the air stream that would blow up the girls skirts, the mirror mazes, the tilting room where you would sit on a swing and as the room tilted you thought you were hanging upside down. There was the invariable "girly show", the cyclorama where motorcycles sped around the walls, defying gravity. But the biggest attraction for me was the wrestling show, which was not continuous but which was always announced by a hard stick run up and down the rivets on a standard water tank. No show started without the barker roiling the crowd as he introduced his champion, daring any spectator to accept the challenge of wrestling the brute for three minutes or to a fall. The crowd invariably called for "Eddieee!". Eddie Ehlers lived on our street, the alcoholic son of the owner of Ehlers Funeral Parlor. I never heard why Eddie was an alcoholic but I could suspect it had to do with living in a mortuary since it was in the same house. Eddie was about mid thirties as I remember him, about 5'10" and weighed about 200 pounds. I'm sure Eddie was already in the know about these challenges and had agreed on the money payment which bought him booze. I didn't see that many matches since most of the time my visits to the carnival were without any money, other than perhaps a dime to buy a hamburg on the way home. The only time I remember having money to spend was when my brother Emil and some friends were there and he gave me a dollar, with instructions to return what I didn't spend. I recall I brought him back a nickel and he thought that was very funny, laughing so hard I thought he would cry. At the time I saw nothing funny about it.

The only show wrestler I remember was "Pegleg McGee". As you can imagine Pegleg, who wore a standard artificial limb with the round wooden pole below the knee, could use that leg to infuriate the audience, as he used it as a battering ram on his opponent. I'm surprised that the present crop of wrestlers don't have a similar character, though I guess it would not be politically correct. As

far as I knew, wrestling on audience demand at carnivals was Eddie's sole source of income because he was almost always drunk. I remember when Eddie died near our house. They found him in the morning in a snowbank, frozen to death. Apparently he had passed out while drunk.

The standard trick to get into the sideshows was to have a friend toss your cap under the open tent so you would go to retrieve it. If no one saw you kept on going. If you were caught you gave the standard explanation: "They threw my cap under the tent." Usually this brought no major retribution but the carnies were a tough lot and often they would rough up the miscreant. If it ever came to fight there was the standard carney group response, triggered by a loud call of "Hey Rube!", which brought them all to the fray. One particular time this response must have been especially brutal because the next day the boys in our neighborhood, which at full strength could muster perhaps twenty boys from ages 10-20 (allowing 2-3 friends for each of my older brothers) had decided to storm the carney workers the next night. The whole day was spent in devising the weapon of choice: brass knucks, clubs etc. I was caught up in the excitement (I was about seven) and had decided that my weapon would be a short 2x4 with a 6" spike driven through the one end. I made my weapon and waited for the evening call to gather in force but to my surprise no one informed me when it was taking place. I had trouble accepting that my participation was not wanted. There was a good brawl but I don't remember any serious injuries.

A big part of the carnival fun were the games of skill which most people, including little me, knew were rigged if sizeable prizes were involved. I remember one night when my brother Joe came home broke, begging mom for some more money. He was almost ready to win this big prize, throwing at the milk bottles. Joe was a very good baseball player and was about 19 at the time. He had already won a huge collection of glass ash trays and he hoped this was evidence that he was close to winning the big prize. All I remember is that mom wouldn't give him any more money.
The two most memorable recalls of carnivals was sitting on a swing in a crazy house that was made to spin while you of course sat still; but it seemed as if you were moving all around the room, even upside down. But the sharpest memories were of the hamburgs that were bought on the way home. I never tasted hamburgs that good until one summer as a married father back for a visit to Indiana I stopped at a roadside restaurant. There actually was one other time I experienced the same taste and that was on a trip to Arizona with the family. I have never been able to reproduce that taste of the meat in a burger fixed at home.

A lesser joy of summer were the Medicine Shows. These generally appeared unannounced and one would find them set up in some vacant lot. They did not require much space, perhaps an area 100x100 feet. There was a tent from which all activities flowed but no customer entered. There was a stage which the barker used to attract attention. They operated only at evening and after the noise began to attract a crowd there usually was a short humorous skit, with members of the audience used as actors. For some reason I always recall one of the lines: as an actor placed a small coin in another actors pocket the latter yelled in torment: “Take it out! Take it out! It’s too heavy!” Why I thought that was a funny line I’ll never know, but it sticks in my memory.

The highlight of the evening and the only purpose of the show was to sell it’s magic elixir which was guaranteed to cure most, if not all ailments. As proof of this there was always shown a large gallon jar containing a tapeworm, with the implied conclusion that practically everyone in the audience had one. After some few minutes of medicinal jargon this elixir, “Made only of roots, herbs, barks, blossoms and berries” was offered for sale. Almost immediately vendors would pass through the crowd, hawking small bottles of this cure-all medicine. A medicine show stayed at a particular lot for only a few days and would then appear in some other lot in town. For some reason I think of all the shows being from one central sponsor, since year after year they had the same format, including the large jar with the tapeworm. For those who don’t know what a tapeworm is, it is a real organism, found sometimes in the intestines of those who are not very careful about the cleanliness of the food they eat and children quite often are the patients. Tape worms can grow to enormous lengths, sometimes 30 feet. If the medicine works they are expelled through the rectum.

CHAPTER 8

A Tough Neighborhood

Because there were so many boys in our family the gatherings involved entirely males. I don’t recall ever seeing a girl as part of the activities. Every gathering was initiated by someone coming by our house and yelling for a particular brother to come out. No one came to the door and knocked. Being a male dominated environment our neighborhood had a reputation for being tough, and it was. I remember two challenge fights in particular. “Geets” Hedrick who was my brother Willie’s age and friend, was Romanian and they had a reputation, earned, as being the toughest

fighters. As I have mentioned there were a lot of negroes who lived in the neighborhood and these were tough too. Somehow the paths of “Geets” and a black his age, Gene Hilliard came to the challenge fighting stage. The date was set and I remember the place was a bank above the “sprays”. The spray was an artificial pond built by PPG to aerate and cool the water they used in glass making. It was common for the mist to blow as far as our house, which was about a half mile away. Both fighters (who were about 18 at the time) had their rooting sections. All I remember was that the fight didn’t last long (there were no rounds) and Geets won on a technical knockout.

I remember another challenge fight involving my brother Willie, under the street lights one summer evening when he fought Bob Jewell who was from a rival neighborhood. I saw the fight and thought Willie won, but in later years Willie said he thought he had lost. These kinks of fights were gentlemanly challenges but sometimes, in fact quite often, they were more lethal. I remember the night a neighbor came to use our phone to call the police (ours was the only phone in the neighborhood): Solvo had just shot and killed his wife> the issue was that she had been having a secret affair with another man. I went to school with his young son. And I remember his sentence was six years, with time off for good behavior. I those days there was general tolerance for violence when there was “cause” and this killing came under that category. I read later that in Italy adultery triggered killings are accepted.

There was a Romanian Hall nearby by that had gotten a second name: The Bucket of Blood. Actually I remember only one murder that took place in the building but of course my memory covered only about 10 years. I remember coming home after school and seeing the blood trail down the sidewalk leading to the PPG First Aid entrance. One black had slit another black’s throat and he almost made it to the door before he fell over dead. Two Romanian neighbor friends were called “Big Chickadee” and “Little Chickadee”. They got in a drunken brawl and one, I don’t recall which, hit the other on the head with a shoe last and killed him.

It was an in-house story that I heard only after my father had died that a co-worker of his had probably murdered someone. The house where the murder took place was connected by an alley to our house and right after the time of the murder someone in our family spotted my father’s co-

worker running down the alley. Later that evening at PPG he came late to work and told my father that if anyone inquired as to when he came to work for the 10:00PM night shift it was 10 minutes earlier. The murder was never solved and my father did not have to worry about the requested alibi. But it was an unwritten law that you let others settle their differences in their own fashion, without interference. A corollary of that was that we never worried about random violence. There was always cause when it occurred. And one didn't worry about a break-in to the house, which was never locked. The only incident that I remember was that once there was a commotion in the hen house as if someone might be stealing chickens, and my brother Lewie got a pistol and fired at someone running away. Property rights were defended lethally, if necessary. I remember too that my sister Rose kept a shotgun on the farm and occasionally had to fire it to scare someone away. John Cook who had a small farm near by was known to blast anyone with his shotgun loaded with rock salt if he caught you trying to steal watermelons. I was with my brother Willie one time near dusk when he stopped to grab a few ears of corn from Cook's field. He (or someone) was waiting for us and we took off lickety split for the barbed wire fence, waiting for the sound of the shotgun. I was about 10 at the time, Willie about 18 and he was over the fence running before I got there. I figured he had leaped over the fence but when I tried it I landed on the very top strand. I made it over but I still carry a white scar from that deep cut into my thigh from the barbed wire.

The most memorable personal experience, however, was when a bomb was exploded under the house next door. Actually there was an intervening house but our house was within 50 feet of the Drago's house where the bomb exploded. I was sleeping with brother Lewie at that time and he had just come home about two o'clock in the morning when the blast came. It blew out all the windows on one side of our house, including the bedroom where I slept. It seemed to be common knowledge that "Big Angelo" had planted the bomb under Annie Drago's window. It killed their canary but hurt no one else. The accepted story was that Annie, who was about 18 at the time, had jilted Big Angelo and he took his revenge. She never married him and the explosion was never solved, because no one ratted on another. Dragos were Sicilian Italians and they had a reputation for violent behavior. Several Italians from our neighborhood got involved with Chicago gangs during prohibition: one was found shot dead in a cornfield, the traditional end point when one was "taken for a ride". A second one was caught in Chicago just as he was about to dump a gunny sack with a dead body in the river. My brother Lewie who had many Italian friends went along one night as his friend drove

from Kokomo to Chicago with a load of bootleg liquor. He told of a wild chase over back, country roads, as they finally escaped from a hi-jacking attempt.

After I had gone away to college I brought home a friend for the weekend and filled him in with some of the above tales. I don't think he believed me until just as we walked up to the house where my brother Emil still lived, a young negro boy whom I used to play with and who still lived next door came running up to me with the words: "Did you hear about the killing?" Apparently that very morning another negro lady who lived with her husband near our old house had followed him to work and blasted him in the head with a shotgun. After she was sure he was dead she hid the gun under the bunk house next door to Emil's house (which was our original family home). Needless to say that event added credibility to my stories.

Some of the tougher neighbors couldn't get their fill of fights with friends and as they grew old enough to drink at a bar fights quickly became a Saturday night ritual. I remember Frank Hedrick, who was about 5'8", 140#, who loved to fight. On numerous Mondays he would recount that weekend's brawl. It seemed that often Frankie had to make up a provocation but that was a minor nuisance. And it seemed that he got just as much pleasure recounting the fights that he lost as the ones that he won. I always liked Frankie. At about eight years old I would snitch cigarettes from my older brothers and sell them to Frankie at bargain prices. I remember one happy memory of Frankie coming to my rescue. He was the same age as my brother Mick and the two of them along with other members of the neighborhood baseball team were playing a game in Sommers park. There was a sliding board there and since I was too young to play I was enjoying myself on the slide. But then an older black boy who had the nickname "Hots" began giving me a hard time. I remember Frankie coming over, uninvited, and telling Hots: "You let him alone or I'm going to beat the s--- out of you". That ended my torment.

CHAPTER 9

Ghosts in the Cemetery

I don't remember how certain pranks were initiated since I was too young to sit in on the planning stage. But I learned quickly that the neighborhood group, that was always built around my brothers was creating ghosts in the nearby Crown Point Cemetery. A group would collect after dark

and proceed to the cemetery where they would wait until some car was passing by and on signal would jump up, with white sheets over their heads and begin wailing. There developed a certain professionalism about these nightly events and different players vied for the best performances. The best act that I remember was put on by one of the older boys who was about 18. Orel Pasch was always a little odd and this particular night he managed to break into one of the larger mausoleums. A few minutes later we could hear his screams and after about five minutes he came out with his face streaming blood, yelling “It’s after me! It’s after me!” Of course that made for some excitement since even though we all knew it was all a joke this performance seemed for real. But Orel had planned the whole thing and had deliberately scratched his face with fingernails to produce the effects.

These ghostly charades continued off and on for several weeks and finally the local paper, the Kokomo Tribune, ran a front page story about the ghostly sightings. This all happened coincided with the recent arrival of my young Brohman cousins from Germany. Frank, the middle cousin, was about 17 at the time and was one of my favorites. But he was highly imaginative and could be a little wild. At that summers Fourth of July firecracker fight, which was traditional, Frank went into our house and brought out a Roman Candle which he proceeded to light and use for his weapon. For those who do not know what a Roman Candle is, it is an 18" by 1" round tube that contains about a dozen phosphorous balls. One lights the end and swirls the candle around as it propels, like a slow rocket, the burning balls. Normally they are shot into the sky where they make a beautiful stream up to a height of about 50 feet. Except Frank used the candle like a gun, propelling the burning phosphorous at the other players. One ball caught Marly Bailey on the bare calf of his leg and all hell broke loose. The phosphorous clings to what it hits and the burns from it are deep and very slow to heal. Marley was still limping a month later. I was rather glad that it was Marley who got the blast since he had recently stomped my bare big toenail with the stock of my BB gun and I had lost the nail. My memory of childhood pain always put slammed nails from either toes or fingers at the top of the list.

This was a rather long aside about Frank Brohman but it was necessary to lead into his actions at the cemetery. Somehow, when Frank had come from his home in Germany he managed to bring with him a semi-automatic 25 caliber pistol. Hold the trigger and it would empty the magazine

in about three seconds. The night when my older brothers sought to initiate Frank into the ghostly cemetery they did not know that he had brought along his pistol. They had set him up to be frightened by recounting all the ghostly apparitions which were about to occur. Little did they know that they had frightened Frank enough that when the first ghost appeared from behind a tombstone Frank pulled out his pistol and started firing. Luckily no one was hit but that ended the ghost display for the night. Frank was a talented person, had won prizes as a youngster in Germany as a soccer player, played the Zither which he had brought to this country and was kept upstairs in our house and was an excellent machinist, having been trained in Germany in a technical school. He soon got a job in at the General Electric plant in Fort Wayne and for years, with a buddy German friend named Rudy tried to build a perpetual motion machine. I saw some of the working models: the only problem was that they didn't work; Frank had never learned that the task was theoretically impossible. He was an impatient person and once I had been with him as he drove a car and the driver in front of him was going too slow up a hill. So Frank nudged up behind him and pushed him up the hill, much to the other driver's consternation. But Frank was always one of my favorites. He was especially kind to my mother and deeply appreciated what she had done for him, bringing him to the States to live with us. In fact after Frank had just arrived he became quite homesick, especially for his friend Fritz Ehrhard who was still back in Germany. So my mother payed passage and sponsored Fritz to join us in Kokomo. He lived with us just a short while and started work at the PPG. Fritz was short but very muscular and friends from work told tales about his great strength. that he could "hang blocks" which involved lifting a block (I believe a block was a hanger to help hold sheets of plate glass), which weighed almost two hundred pounds, over his head and put it in place without help. Fritz was a boiler maker by training and had built for me a small steam engine involving a boiler that held about a gallon of water. If it had ever blown I'm sure it would have blown our house apart.

There is another incident about Frank Brohman which if I don't mention it here will probably be lost to history. Our family had in-law relatives in Lafayette, Indiana which was about 40 miles from Kokomo and one day Frank offered to drive my mother and me to visits our son Joe's in-laws, the Baers. All three of us were riding in the front seat, with me in the middle. I was about eight years old at the time. After we hit Lafayette Frank turned a city corner rather quickly; the right passenger door flew open and out flew my mom onto the street. Frank was unaware that his had happened and

I was almost too frightened to talk. Frank finally noticed mom was missing and turned back. We found mom, only slightly bruised walking down the street.

CHAPTER 10

Near Tragedies

With ten children spanning the age range of 22 years, mom had better things to do than keep track of where each of them were all hours of the day. Consequently each of us including me spent most of the day unsupervised or tracked. Growing up without the restraints that would naturally come from a mother we all had a lot of latitude in how we spent our time. I could be gone all day, playing ball or cards, or go "up the creek" fishing or plain exploring, or start out walking the railroad track with a few friends to some town 5-10 miles away. All these activities were adventures, with unforeseen hazards. I never learned to swim more than I could cover without breathing so if I fell into deep water there was a good chance that I would drown. I remember many times walking alone along deep gravel pits, aware that if I fell in I was probably a goner. But only once did I come near drowning. My brother Duck and some others took me along on a fishing trip up the Wildcat and since I couldn't keep pace they asked me to stay on the bank and wait for them to return. I got tired of waiting and decided I would wade in the creek for a while. But I didn't realize that at that point there was a deep drop-off where a company was dredging gravel. I took one step too far, started to go under but managed to get back to shallower water.

The following stories were told within the family and happened before I was born. The brothers involved were in an age range of about 8-14 when the events happened. The first involved my brothers Lewie and Willie. Lewie was about two years older and both were sliding on the ice of the Wildcat creek at the time it ran near our house. The ice broke and Willie went under and didn't resurface, since the creek water was still moving under the ice. Brother Lewie jumped through the hole and was able to locate Willie and pull him out.

My mother recounted this next story as she remembered it. She heard yelling from outside the house about midday and there were several boys about Joe's age, who was about ten at the time, pulling a wagon with Joe's apparently lifeless body. "Joe drowned at the 'Yard Wide' " they called to my mother. The "Yard Wide" was a part of the Wildcat creek about a half mile away where a

narrow inlet (about a yard wide) entered the Wildcat. The other boys had pulled Joe from the water and hauled him home, supposedly dead. Except my mother was able to revive him, she didn't say how. He suffered no ill effects from his "drowning".

Joe and Karl were involved in the next story which was told to me by Joe when I visited him in a hospital long after I had moved away from Kokomo. Joe and Karl, who was about six years older than Joe (I would guess their ages were about 8 and 14 at he time) were swimming alone in the Wildcat creek. Karl who was an adequate swimmer apparently got a cramp and went under. When he didn't surface Joe swam over and dived where he had last seen him. He quickly found Karl lying on the bottom, not breathing and realized he was not strong enough to bring him to the surface. So Joe started dragging Karl along the bottom, coming up for air periodically, then diving again to drag Karl some more. Eventually Joe was able to get Karl to the shore and pull him out and got him breathing again, with artificial respiration. Again no ill effects.

My mother was also the teller of this story which she observed first hand. She was in the house and brothers Karl and Emil (ages probably about 14 and 6) when she happened to look out the window and see Karl hanging from our cherry tree's limb, with a noose around his neck. She quickly went outdoors and got Karl down before he had choked to death. What had happened was that the two of them were playing with a rope and pulley device which was balanced to pull a person up into the tree when a heavy weight was dropped. Apparently it had worked OK for pulling up Emil up .But when Emil had the job of releasing the weight to pull Karl up the rope which was fastened under one arm, leaving one arm free to grab onto a limb after the ride, slipped up and closed around Karl's neck. Of course he was held up by the weight and Emil was too small to help him down. Luckily my mother saw the near hanging in time.

Another near tragedy again involved Joe. Mom was at home when some older boys came running to the house, yelling "Joe's been shot". A few minutes later Joe showed up with a bandaged hand. He had been hunting with a shotgun and it had accidentally discharged when he tried to climb over a fence. He had his handover the muzzle but fortunately all he lost was some flesh from the hand. While on the subject of Joe I'll tell two other stories that relate to guns but which had no bad

consequences. It was common to let anyone in the house have access to guns and ammunition. I had a rifle and BB gun from the time I was about eight. On this particular day Joe was playing with his shotgun when it discharged in the house, blasting a hole in the ceiling. At about this same period Joe was coming home from a rabbit hunt with his shotgun when a neighbor's mean dog, which was not always kept tied, got out and started chasing Joe down the street. Joe was frightened enough that he turned around while running and shot and killed the dog. Joe always kept the gun loaded until he got home since there was always a chance that he would see another rabbit. After Joe got home and told our mom what had happened she went to the neighbor who owned the dog and paid him $5. As far as I know that settled the incident.

As I said we had a lot of guns in the house. There were about four shot guns; a 25 caliber automatic that my sister Josie (Josephine) carried as a concealed weapon since she often carried large sums of money for the paving company she worked for (she had a permit); A 7mm Luger automatic which my mother had brought back from her visit to Germany in 1928. She had a half-brother who was a policeman in Germany and he had given her the gun. Of course it was illegal to do this but she had it dis-assembled in her purse and got it past customs (along with a lot of other contraband hidden in the false bottom of her trunk). It was a beautiful gun and I remember one time when we were out shooting it a friend of my brothers made the mistake of putting his face too close to the sight. He didn't know that the fired empty shell casing was discharged vertically: he lost the tip of his nose!

My brother Emil had a Smith and Wesson 38 Special which he sometimes used to hunt rabbits. On cold days rabbits sit very tight and a handgun is effective. Speaking of effective, most people hunted rabbits with a shotgun but my brother Joe who was probably the best shot, used a rifle. He could hit running rabbits about as easily as someone else could with a shotgun. We also had a 25/20 rifle for which we had a shell loader, since it was an unusual caliber. There were several automatic rifles and several other small pistols. I used to snitch ammunition to throw into an outdoors fire to watch it explode, or put the loaded shells on the railroad track before a train came by. Occasionally there was real tragedy from guns. Bill Dickey a boy of 18 who lived three houses up the street was out hunting and a fellow hunter accidentally shot him in the back and killed him.

The closest I came to being involved in a real tragedy came one summer evening when I was

about 10. The neighborhood would occasionally get cats that roamed wild and lived off anything they could find to eat. Once they discovered a henhouse they became frequent visitors so one had to stop the animal in a hurry. My older brothers had caught one in a steel trap and shot it. I still picture the fury of that cat which was about double normal size because of his special diet. But animals quickly become quite cautious about traps. Rats learn to trigger the spring plate that sets off the trap by heaping dirt onto it. And if a rat is ever caught it often will chew off its leg to free itself and three legged rats are almost impossible to catch again. But getting back to cats. There was a second cat killing our chickens, not every night and not too many because someone would always run lickety split to the hen house. But it was very difficult to trap the cat so one summer eve my brother Duck and I decided to wait, with a shotgun, for the cat to arrive again. We took up a position on top of the garage which backed up to the alley which ran behind our house, lying flat on our bellies. At the back of our property was a solid wood fence, about five feet high which connected to the garage. Just as it was getting dusk we had been waiting about half an hour when Duck spotted the cat walking along the top of the fence. At that point the cat was about 40 feet away but was coming toward so the final shot would be within about ten feet. That would be a no miss shot, even with the failing light. As the cat slowly walked along the top of the fence he suddenly stopped, as we thought probably getting ready to jump down into our yard. It was a perfect scenario for the shot and Duck, who had the shotgun was starting to squeeze the trigger. Just then the cat started to move again and within about one second Duck and I both realized something was wrong. That wasn't a cat! It was our neighbor Jasper, coming home down the alley, and that was his hat (and head!) that we had been tracking along the top of the fence. He had apparently stopped a few seconds to urinate against the fence. I don't remember who saw him first but it produced a terrible feeling of near tragedy in both of us. Neither of us said a word to Jasper as he continued home, and he could not see us lying on top of the garage. I often wondered how our lives would have changed if Jasper had been killed.

CHAPTER 11

The Comics

Reading the comic strips was the main event of the day for me and I believe most of my younger brothers. It was a battle to get to them because my brother Emil, who was the oldest boy in the house after brothers Karl and Joe had married, always insisted on keeping the paper together until he had read it all. But every night there were the regular black and white strips, and on

Saturday (there was no Sunday paper then) we read the expanded, colored full page versions of each of the strips. Kokomo was close to Chicago where almost all the first comics started in the Chicago Tribune under an artist named John McCutcheon. McCutcheon was an artist himself and his most famous rendering was a picture the Tribune first ran in 1907, but would rerun every fall, titled "Indian Summer". This was a double picture that showed an old man at dusk, telling his probable grandson about the falling leaves being the souls of dead Indians. In the background were corn shocks, which in an accompanying picture had become wigwams around which Indians were dancing.

Some of the favorite cartoons were "Bringing Up Father", with Maggie and Jiggs, "Thimble Theater" which introduced over the years Olive Oyl and her friend Popeye, and later Wimpy, the Sea Hag, the Goon etc.; "Moon Mullins" with the main characters Moon and his little brother Kayo who slept in the bureau drawer; "The Gumps"; "Freckles and His Friends"; "Ella Cinders"; "Wash and Gozy" which became successively over the years "Wash Tubbs"," Wash and Easy" then finally "Captain Easy"; "Salesman Sam"; "Board and Room" starring Major Hoople; "Ella Cinders" with a succession of romantic and adventure interests; "Barney Google" which introduced Snuffy Smith who eventually became the dominant character in the strip; Barney Google was so popular that Billie Rose who was a song writer and producer of Broadway musicals, wrote the popular song whose first line was "Barney Google, with the goo-goo-googly eyes"; "Toonerville Trolley" with its cast of dozens of characters; "Little Orphan Annie" with its cast of characters, mainly Daddy Warbucks, The Asp, and Am; "Krazy Kat" with a most memorable character named "Hidda", whose only role was to enter the strip at some panel and announce:'I am Hidda, from Thidda, and Widda muss I go?'; the "Katzenjammer Kids" which were deleted during World War I because of the hatred for all things relating to German; after the war there was a custody fight over the characters between the Chicago Tribune and the artist who first drew it. This issue was settled in the courts with the result that a new artist began to draw "The Katzenjammer Kids" while the original artist was awarded the right to keep the original characters in a new strip called "The Captain and the Kids".

Initially the comics strips were just that: a source of humor. But during the depression many of the strips began to switch to adventure stories which better fit in with the gloomy times. After Captain Easy entered Wash Tubbs, two villains, Bull Dawson and Brick Bain were introduced and

these two were constantly trying to thwart the doings of Wash and Easy. At one point, Easy was accused of murder and the strip for about a year pursued this theme. The artist, whose name I don't remember tried to ease Easy out of the strip by introducing another hero named Rick O'Day but the readers were so dissatisfied that Captain Easy was brought back into the strip. About this same time Ella Cinders friend Patches was also accused of murder with the corresponding travail. Even Barney Google introduced a detective character with the impossible name "Hello Swifty What What What" who had no clear assignment in crime solving. The wildest crime character, in my opinion, was a detective who appeared in every set of four Andy Gump daily panels, always peering around corners, riding on the spare tire of a moving car, but never explained. He was finally removed from the column by a newspaper story panel that read: "famous detective dies; accidentally killed while cleaning gun".

This theme of crime even carried over to the Amos and Andy radio program where Amos, over about a one year period was accused of murder and had to go to trial. There was a reoccurring incident in Freckles about every year when the master criminal Farber would enter the strip for several weeks. Of course Freckles was always in danger but always managed to escape. The same held for Farber and finally, after one episode where Freckles with his pistol shot and broke a rope that dropped Farber into a raging gorge from which Farber again escaped my brother Duck said he would no longer read the strip until Farber was caught. As far as I can remember he never was.
At this same time there were two great single panel daily comics called "The Old Home Town' and another called "Out Our Way", the latter rotating between three casts of characters: one involving workers in a machine shop; a second involving cowboys on a ranch; and the third involving a family with a young boy who behaved like so many young boys do. We kept a collection of the "The Old Home Town" for years but eventually the panels got lost. Sadly I have never seen any reference to that panel in histories of comics, but for our family it was the best.

CHAPTER 12

The Radio

We never got a radio until about 1928 when I was nine. Until then evenings were spent either playing cards, which we did almost every night or reading mainly the local newspaper, and the weekly magazines Liberty, Colliers and The Saturday Evening Post. Sister Josie would bring new

records home almost every week so the Victrola was played often. I can still recite long segments of "The Two Black Crows" records which were issued periodically. And there were the new popular songs which she would occasionally buy. These records were played over and over and is probably the reasons why I know the words to so many songs of that era. Josie also brought home an occasional Nick Carter, or Dr. FuManchu mystery story. For major athletic events, such as the World Series or championship boxing we would go uptown and stand with a crowd of several hundred people in front of the Kokomo Dispatch newspaper building to follow the progress. I remember the 1927 World Series between the New York Yankees and Giants, where someone in the building relayed results from teletype through a loudspeaker, while simultaneously moving players symbols around on a large magnetic board. For the Tunney, Heeney fight I remember there was a loudspeaker only. But when the radio came it took over most of the in-house entertainment.

Early on it was fun just to see what new stations one could find. There were three different dials one had to balance and invariably some bigger brother would show the neophyte how an expert did it. About that same time evening news programs were starting to find listeners and I remember in particular Floyd Gibbons and Lowell Thomas around 5-6 PM. Amos and Andy was the first nightly show I remember. There was a program about two detectives which was always introduced with a singing commercial:"Iodent Toothpastes Numbers 1 and 2, Presenting Deteckativs (spelled to reflect the pronunciation given), Black and Blue". Little Orphan Annie had her own show, always introduced with the sung ditty:"Who's the little chatterbox, the one with all the pretty locks? Who can it be? It's Little Orphan Annie". There was the "Shadow" and "Jake and Lena" shows. Baseball games (primarily the Chicago Cubs) were broadcast regularly and other occasional sporting events. I don't remember my mother doing much radio listening except news programs; but at Christmas time there was a broadcast from Germany with the famous opera singer Madame Schumann-Heink singing Stille Nacht and other hymns in German and she always tuned in to that program Christmas eve.

CHAPTER 13

The Movies

Movies played an important entertainment role in life as long as I can remember. My mother let me go to the movies with my older brothers from about age four and really exercised no

censorship as to what was seen. I mentioned that when I was about four I thought movies were really live enactments of what I learned later was simply a projection on the screen. Cowboys were riding their horses in a field or street behind the theater. I remember when I first became aware of the fact that movies were "sets" when I recognized a bridge that was the same bridge in all the cowboy movies that the hero or villain rode across to come into town. When I was about ten my sister Josie had a friend who owned a movie theater and she got me a pass so that I could go any time I wanted, free. The next year she got me a new pass that let me take a friend also and that upped the frequency of my attendance. Most of the time I went on Saturday afternoon or about as often, on Sunday afternoon after Vespers services at St. Joan of Arc church, which we always attended. Saturday afternoon movies were directed mostly at kids and an important part of them was a "serial" that would run for about ten weeks. Each episode ended with the hero or heroine tied to the railroad tracks, with the train approaching at high speed, or some equivalent danger. The need to go back next week and see what happened was a strong attraction

My favorite cowboys were Tom Mix, Hoot Gibson and Ken Maynard though I also liked Bob Steele, Yakima Canute, and Johnny Mack Brown who rode a horse better than any of them. Most of the cowboys had come out of the rodeo circuit but Johnny Mack Brown had been a star football player at Alabama. Comedies were a big attraction and my favorite comedians were Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Laurel and Hardy. Wallace Berry played in many comedies with either Marie Dressler or a partner named Raymond S. Hatton. The ads would read: "Wallace Berry and Marie Dressler in..." or "Wallace Berry and Raymond S. Hastton in...". I can't imagine a movie actor these days being identified as having a middle initial. All movies in those days had "trailers" or "short subjects" and many of these involved "Our Gang" with its fixed cast of characters. Mickey Rooney who played the tough kid was originally modeled on one of Fontaine Fox's Toonerville Trolley comic strip characters: "Mickey (himself) McGuire". That was his original screen name until Fox sued the studio over rights to the character. So Mickey McGuire became Mickey Rooney.

The movies were silent until about 1929 and each theater had a piano player in the front left corner who played the appropriate mood music to fit the action. I loved the movies. The only negative remembrance was that often, after the main attraction and before the short subjects, there would be an intermission where they sold food and rested the piano player. They would turn on the

lights and announce they were going to pass a collection plate for the old actors retirement home. I always pictured the actors as being the richest people in the world and that collection always made me angry, partly because it embarrassed me since I would never give any money, not even a penny in the collection basket. There was one early period when I was about six or seven and I couldn't last very long without having to urinate. I had an accident in school, got sent home, and mom convinced the teacher to let me go to the bathroom simply by raising my hand. But that didn't work in the movie theaters because many of them did not have a restroom. My older brothers didn't like having to leave in the middle of the movie simply because I had to go. They complained to mom and for a while I was not permitted to go to the movies with them. Finally I convinced mom that I could last the whole time of the movie and was again able to join my brothers. But as it turned out I couldn't always last and learned that if I went to the back row where no one was sitting I could relieve myself without anyone knowing.

Smells in those days were such an ordinary part of life that I doubt anyone ever noticed the urine smell. In fact there was a lot of union trouble and the favorite union technique was to put a stink bomb in the theater. Some union worker would leave an uncapped container of some horrible smelling liquid that reminded me of rotten eggs. After that person left some other unsuspecting person would take that same seat and accidentally spill the liquid. As I remember it usually took several weeks to get most of the smell out of the theater. A movie theater was the source of one of my funniest memories. This happened in a larger theater that had a restroom (I may have had something to do with the change). I had used the urinal and when I went over to wash my hands I saw a paper dispenser that said: "Rub, don't blot". I had never seen a paper towel dispenser before and thought the instructions had to do with how one should clean his behind after doing #2. That struck me so funny, picturing someone needing to be told not to blot his behind instead of rubbing it c lean. It wasn't until much later that I learned the paper towels were for drying one's hands.

The clearest memory I have of individual movies are of adventure or "scary" movies. Mom took me out of school to see the premier of Ben Hur when I was about eight. That required reserved seats and I felt so proud to know that the ticket stub meant that particular seat was mine to sit on. She did the same thing when Blackstone the Magician put on his show. Douglas Fairbanks was my main movie hero, rather than the cowboys. I still remember the scenes from "The Black Pirate" and

"The Mark of Zorro". Fairbanks was a superb athlete and did all his own acrobatic and fight scenes. One of the memorable ones was when he was sword fighting and placed a small dagger upright in the sand and forced the villain to fall backwards on the sword. There was a scene from "The Black Pirate" that always puzzled me until probably fifty years late I saw the original version again. The scene involved Fairbanks and his crew pre-rigging a boat so that it could fall apart by pulling a rope as they rowed toward the enemy ship.. When the enemy was lobbing cannonballs at their boat they pretended that the boat had been hit and sunk. They then swam underwater and captured the enemy ship. As a child I could never understand the maneuver since my logic told me they should have been killed if a cannonball hit the boat.

I remember five movies that were the scariest I have ever seen. Three involved Lon Chaney, "The man of a thousand faces". Chaney played in the original version of "The Phanthom of the Opera" and I still get the chills when I remember his taking off his mask. There was a scene from that movie which always puzzled me for over fifty years. I could remember a scene being in color, with Chaney wearing a bright red cloak walking down a long stairway. Except of course that movie was made in the period when there were no color movies. I finally learned much later that for that one particular scene each frame had been hand painted in color. Two other scary Chaney films were "London After Midnight" and "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". A movie that made me wet the bed the same night was Fredrich March playing the dual role of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. There was a bicycle scene in that movie that I could not understand since in those days there was little explicit showing of violence. Rewatching the movie many years later I learned that a little girl had been riding that bicycle as Mr. Hyde was approaching and all the scene showed was a twisted bicycle. I didn't understand. There was the Leopold and Loeb trial at about that time, involving the torture and killing of a little boy in Chicago but none of that registered on me (or my mother) as a cause for concern.

The two most talked about scary movies were "Frankenstein" with Boris Karloff and "Dracula" with Bela Lugosi. I remember the talk in grade school that half the theater would faint during the former. That never happened but those two movies set the standard for the many scary movies that followed. Two of the most widely followed adventure actors had a puzzling similarity in their names: Richard Bartholomew and Dick Bartholomes. They even looked alike. But I can't for

the life of me remember any particular movie they played in. At that point in my life girls were a negative and what was great about the cowboy movies was that the hero never kissed the girl. Sex seemed to play no important role in life and I suppose that was partly because ours was almost a total male dominated family which in turn had only male friends for my brothers.. Come to think of it I don't remember ever seeing a girl involved in any play or "hanging out" activity. It came as a shock then when my brother Emil who was about 18 at the time came home, raving about an Eddie Cantor movie which I knew involved scantily clad chorus girls. I remember his bursting into the room that early evening, all enthused and I felt betrayed. How could he enjoy a movie that had so many girls in it? He had no girl friend and I could not believe that he could be interested in such a movie. I think the movie was "Roman Scandals".

In fact I had only one point in my life before I went to high school that the other sex had any interest for me. I recently read an article that surprised psychologists that sexual interest can start as early as age six, and that was what happened to me. It was my first weeks of grade school and their staring at me, sitting on our teacher, Sr. Mary's lap was Margaret Mozingo, all of 5 or 6 years old, dressed in a two piece outfit. It was almost as if I had never seen a girl before in my life. She wore no dress, only a pair of brief panties and a short blouse, and those panties seemed to be staring just at me.. One day the outfit was pink, the next day it was blue, alternating. When I would go to bed at night I would fantasize about Margaret and those panties, what was underneath.. It wasn't until I was about ten that I became aware, (by an accidental sighting) that girls were missing an important part of a boy's body so in first grade all my fantasies were about a little girl my age, who looked just like me without her panties. I don't remember how long those night fantasies went on but they didn't last through the first grade. I quickly reverted to the male, tough guy person, who got upset when one day after school a girl in my class, Onda Bolinger, rode her bicycle over to see me. I pretended to my brothers that I didn't even know her, while they smiled and snickered to my embarrassment.

CHAPTER 14

The Depression

By 1929 sister Rose and brothers Karl and Joe had been married so that left mom and the seven other children at home. Before the depression came our family had Josie, Emil, Lewie and Willie working and bringing in money. Finances were favorable enough that my mother and older

siblings decided the family could build a new house. Up to that point in time our parents had bought a lot for each of the children, including myself, on which at some future date we might build. Our new planned house was northwest of town (our present house was mostly due east) and the plans for it were drawn up by the family, working with a builder. I remember it's original cost estimate was about $3000 which was quite a step up in the world for us since our present home had an offer for only $1500. It was a large two story house on Jefferson Street. About half-way through construction, costs for some reason started to escalate and approach $4000. This was happening just as the depression was starting to broaden and it became apparent that we could not afford the house. The PPG factory had shut down completely which left almost 5000 workers out of a job. But because my brother Emil had lost an eye in a machine shop accident he was kept on as a watchman. Josie kept her job (probably at reduced wages) as did Lewie. Willie was able to get a job driving a city bus and earned $8 a week, whenever the transit company had enough money to pay.

It seemed that we would basically lose the entire present investment in the home. But sister Rose came to the rescue. Rose had married Cecil Wells, the owner of a local glass factory that made different colored glasses and by our family standards she was "wealthy". Cecil and Rose could well afford the house at that time and made some changes and completed the house. I presume they paid mom and family some portion of the investment. But within about two years Cecil's factory also went bankrupt and he in turn sold it to my married brother Karl who still had a fairly decent job and income as an accountant. Rose and Cecil took their remaining savings, which was $5000 and bought an 80 acre farm near Center, Indiana which was about five miles from Kokomo. Neither knew anything about farming and could barely scratch out a living. Rose told me later that she cried daily for that first year.

Brother Joe who was married lost his job and I remember one period where he chose to cut firewood rather than "go on the county". Brother Lewie who was 22 in 1929 had been working as an analytical chemist even though he had only an eighth grade education. He started a "beaker boy" at 14, washing dishes for his boss who gradually taught him some analytical techniques. In 1929, sensing his job future was not too certain Lewie answered an ad in the Fort Wayne newspaper for an analytical chemist to work for General Electric. Lewie polished his resume to include a statement that he was a graduate of Notre dame with a four year degree in chemistry. He got the job and

shortly thereafter my sister Josie got a job with a securities firm in Ft. Wayne and shared an apartment with Lewie. When I graduated from grade school in 1933 I moved to Ft. Wayne to attend the Central Catholic high school and to live with Josie and Lewie. This left brothers Emil, Willie and Duck back at our Vaile Avenue home with mom.

Merchants tried everything to get people to buy during the depression. They started giving lottery tickets with each purchase and about once a month there would be a public drawing for the winning prizes. These drawings were held Saturday evening in Foster Park, which was a large park near the center of town and drew thousands of people. The drawing was as much a gathering of kindred souls as it was an expectation of winning one of the prizes. There was an in house story that one of our family had overheard at a bakery where they were giving away, free, stale bread. One of the potential recipients was heard to say: “What good’s bread without butter?” and that became a family joke. Our family, with the house paid for and a large garden, raising chickens which provided also the eggs was able to get by with little pain. All of the older brothers hunted and fished and during the summer months we had an almost endless supply of snapper turtles which were kept alive in a large basin. Mostly the turtle was eaten fried but my mother made the best snapper soup, using only the shell as a source of turtle flavor. After the turtle was cleaned the shell was scalded with boiling water so that the tough outer skin could be peeled off. Then a hand ax was used to split the spinal column to expose the meat and the shell itself was cut up to go with barley and vegetables. Barley was always a staple of our diet and I was surprised after marrying that Betty had never eaten barley before.

Lots of things were “put up” to be eaten out of season. Mom used to make sauerkraut in a large earthen container that was about two feet high and about 18' in diameter. The sauerkraut was made by shredding cabbage, alternating this with coarse salt and vinegar and when the tub was full cover it with a large plate weighted down with a stone that must have weighed twenty pounds. This preparation had to “work” (ferment) before it was ready to eat. I remember that there was always a barrel of sauerkraut in the cellar. The cellar held also all the other canned fruit, vegetables and jams. To prevent freezing in winter of the glass jars, which would have cracked, the cellar had a full barrel (I would guess about 50 gallon size) of water. Most people I have found do not know that when water freezes it gives off heat. If the cellar temperature got down to freezing the barrel of water

would start to freeze first since it is the nature of all mixtures or solutions that they freeze at a lower temperature than pure water. So the freezing water gave off enough heat to prevent the temperature of the cellar from dropping below 32 degrees, which protected the preserved items.

The cellar also was where the wine which my mother made was kept. The most common kinds were dandelion, elderberry, cherry, and grape. I remember the many Sundays when Josie's political friends would come by the house for a drink. Josie was big time into politics and a frequent visitor was the Indiana's Republican Senator in Washington, Jim Watson. Josie used to keep an autographed photo of Watson in her bedroom. Josie worked for the largest paving contractor in Kokomo, a man by the name of Walter Dixon and it seemed that political ties similar to today's lobbying groups also operated then. Dixon as I recall was always present when Watson came by the house. And remember this was during prohibition. Josie was important enough in State Republican politics that once she was invited to the White House to see President Coolidge. I remember the write up on the front page of the local paper. That honor may be why Josie's German shepherd had the name Cal, full name Calvin Coolidge. That presidential name carried over to the 1928 election when brother Emil bought two coon dogs from a litter and named them Herbert Hoover and Al Smith after the two candidates. Herbie survived distemper as a pup but Al Smith died and Herbie who turned out to be a poor coon hunter (he would get sidetracked on rabbit trails) became the family pet and lived for over 12 years. For some reason the naming of dogs in our family did not follow the usual track. I remember two former dogs who were named after Mutt and Jeff, the comic strip characters.

Dandelion wine was the only wine that required my mother to leave the family premises to gather the dandelion flowers for the wine. We did this as I recall on the family lots that we owned on Markland Avenue, about a half mile away. I was only about four at the time but I remember her telling me to get down low whenever a car passed so that no one would see us gathering the flowers. Mom never took kindly to prohibition. Besides all the wine making I recall getting packages from Germany that contained either brandied candy or once, a bottle of liquor inserted in a hallowed out loaf of bread. And once on a car trip to Canada she tried to bring back two bottles of schnapps that she had fastened under her dress. We were making the border crossing from Canada at Roushes Point, NY which had a reputation for spotting smugglers and sure enough they caught mom. She had

to get out of the car, go into the customs building where they found the two bottles .As I recall the fine was $5 per bottle but nothing more than that. When she came back from her trip to Germany in 1928 she was able to bring in a large batch of liquor in the false bottom of her steamer trunk without being caught. But mom, as far as I saw, drank very little. She always kept a bottle of Blackberry Brandy for "medicinal purposes" and I still have a partial bottle that she gave me over 50 years ago.

CHAPTER 15

The Ku-Klux-Klan

Few people know that in the early 20's Indiana had become the center of the Klan movement in the U.S. The Klan had started in 1866 after the Civil War, in Pulaski, Tennessee by a group of Confederate soldiers more as a social club. The name came from the Greek word Kuklos which means "circle", and was changed to Ku Klux with Klan indicating it was a club. The original namings were more for amusement than fright and the founding group was taken with the alliterative K sounds which became part of the hierarchy of offices, signs, signals and words. Local dens were governed by an "Exalted Cyclops" with officers under him called Klaliff, Klokard, Kludd, Kligrapp, Klabee, Kladd, Klagaro, Klexter, Klokann which corresponded to vice-president, lecturer, chaplain, secretary, treasurer, conductor, inner guard, outer guard and investigating committee. The Klan had its own calendar and July 4, 1923 for example was "The Dismal Day of the Weeping Week of the Hideous Month of the year of the Klan LVII."

The Klansmen sang not songs but "Klodes" and held "Klonvocations". The Klan greeting between two members was "Kotop" to which the second answered "Potok", both meaningless words. Code words were formed from the first letters of the appropriate phrase: Ayak for example stood for "Are you a Klansman?" and Akia for "A Klansman I am". A left hand clasp was a "Klasp" formed from the first letters of "Klan loyalty a sacred principle". Originally membership included foreigners, Jews and Catholics but after three years some Klan activity began to target the northern "carpetbaggers" for terrorism and the KKK was disbanded in 1869. It was not reorganized until 1915 by a Georgia preacher named "Colonel" William Joseph Simmons, with a new set of rules that not only excluded foreigners, Jews and Catholics but made them its primary targets.

Post World War I the Klan had only about 3000 members until it was joined by a pair of

professional fund raisers named Mr. Clark and Mrs. Tyler. These two had been fund raisers for the Anti-Saloon League, Near East Relief and the Teddy Roosevelt Memorial Fund. With their addition and efforts the Klan membership grew to over 100,000 within two years, drawing mostly from the Midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. Kokomo, with its alliterative K sounds fit right in with the Klan symbolism and was at the center of the Klans membership growth those early years. By 1923 Kokomo alone had over 10,000 members which was about one half its adult population.. Each State had its Grand Dragon and for Indiana this man was David C. Stephenson. Stephenson was born in Texas in 1891 and moved to Evansville, Indiana right after WW I. He began to get active in veterans affairs and in politics and in 1920 ran for Congress as a Democrat as a "wet". He was defeated by the Anti-Saloon League vote and promptly switched parties to become a "dry" Republican and became an organizer for the Klan. By 1922 he had succeeded so well that he was made the Grand Dragon for the state of Indiana, with headquarters in Indianapolis.

In 1923 Stepenson, in collaboration with the national Klan called for a Konklave to be sponsored by the three states of Indiana, Illinois and Ohio, to be held in Kokomo on July 4, 1923. The two day Konklave drew over 100,000 to the main gathering place, Melfalfa Park, which had a large grassy knoll of about 100 acres. I, nor as far as I know, no members of my family went near that gathering. I do remember vividly that about this time (it could even have been at the same time) that a large contingent of hooded Klansmen marched up and down the street in front of our house. I recall, too, some of my older siblings spotting the outlines and walk pattern of some of our neighbors. The Klan made many public threats against blacks, foreigners, Jews and Catholics, and even threatened to tar and feather our local priest, Fr. Pratt. But nothing happened in Kokomo, other than a defacing of the altar at St. Patricks, which many thought was the work of the Klan. There was one lynching of a young negro in Marion, a town about 20 miles from Kokomo. He had been arrested and accused of raping a white woman and within days people stormed the jail and took the man and hanged him. At that time it was also common to see signs outside the small towns, where the Klan was most active, that read: "Blackman- don't let the sun set on you in this town".

Nationally the Klan was becoming a force to be reckoned with. It had taken over the election of practically all offices in the state of Indiana. It was well known that the Governor and most of the legislature kowtowed to the Klan. Stephenson publicly proclaimed "I am the law in Indiana" and

few challenged him. At the national level the Klan had quickly grown to over five million members by 1924: in the south they were Democrats, in the north they were Republicans. In the 1924 Democratic convention for President the Klan prevented the nomination of Al Smith, who was Catholic and the leading candidate. When he was nominated in 1928 he lost mainly because of the Klan opposition. I remember reading and hearing all the tales about how the Pope was going to build a tunnel to the White House, how nunneries were dens of immorality with the basements full of dead fetuses, fathered by the priests. This major influence of the Klan however had begun to decline in 1925 when Stephenson was charged with the rape and murder of a secretary in one of the state offices in Indianapolis, a girl named Madge Oberholzer. Stephenson had his bodyguards kidnap the girl and force her to accompany him on a train trip to Chicago. After the rape, the girl was able to escape and in desperation swallowed bichloride of mercury in either an attempt at suicide or an abortion. Stephenson kept her captive for several days in the loft above his garage but finally took her home where she died a few weeks later. At his trial he was found guilty and given life inprisonment. This scandal, involving the most prominent Klansman of the day started the rapid decline of the Klan movement in the United States.

It was an irony of the times that the only hospital serving the Kokomo area was The Good Samaritan Hospital, a small hospital run by nuns, the Sisters of St. Joseph. This infuriated the Klan who mounted a successful drive to build a much larger and modern hospital west of town. As I recall it was called the Howard County Hospital. It was a great hospital: the only problem was that it had few patients.. This situation continued as the Depression hung on and eventually the hospital closed. It was eventually sold and guess who bought it? The Sisters of St. Joseph. It is still the only hospital serving the Kokomo area.

CHAPTER 16

My Mother

I have waited to this point in the narrative to write more about my mother. One has to understand the times and the kind of neighborhood we lived in to appreciate my mother. Probably because of her own difficult childhood she had deep empathy towards the less fortunate. I have told the story of her early childhood and migration to the States and the difficult life with her father. And how she brought to the States her sisters three children, plus one of their friends, to live with the ten children she was left with after our father died in 1922. In hindsight she reminded me of Christ,

when confronted by the angry crowd over his sympathy for Mary Magdalen: “Who among you can cast the first stone?” I remember the time when a relative had become pregnant by a married man and most in our family were condemning her. And my mother, to my surprise and shock said: “There are worse sins than adultery!”. It was a shock to me because my Catholic training from the nuns seemed to have elevated the sixth commandment to the top of the list. Later in life I also realized that there is a great distinction between those sins of the flesh, which have little third party effects and those which are directly a violation of individual rights of individuals, such as the widespread treatment of minorities, or the innocent.

I did not see this happen but my brother Emil’s daughter Judy did, as she was a small child walking with her grandmother. As they walked by a neighboring yard my mother saw the mother beating a small child with a stick. My mother immediately went to the woman and took the stick away from her, with an appropriate lecture. A similar story happened to me personally. After I had gone to college I came home to Kokomo for a weekend visit with my brother Emil who still lived in the family home. While I was in the neighborhood (which I had left about six years before when I moved to Ft. Wayne to go to High School) a boy about my age approached me and called me by name. At first I didn’t recognize him but as he began talking his name came back to me. Almost the first thing he said to me was to recall his great love and admiration for my mother, supporting his view with a story that I had never heard. One day many years before, he had been playing in our yard and had done something that my mother thought unacceptable. She stopped the action, gave the boy a swat on his behind and sent him home. But the whole point of the story as the boy told it was the negative reaction of the boy’s mother to the disciplining. But the boy knew that my mother had been right and he was now telling this story in admiration for her. Without using words my mother taught me that I was indeed my brother’s keeper. I thought of this incident when many years later, as a father of four, I got up in the middle of the night to awaken a neighbor across the street and tell them that their little girl who was about three had been crying for almost an hour and I was concerned that they might not hear her. The neighbors had just moved in that very day and I had never met them. But my mothers life reminded me that something serious might be wrong and that I had to be concerned. The East is very different from the Midwest and those who stick their noses in other peoples businesses are generally not looked on kindly. But I had to do it. The next morning I went over again and explained why I had done what I had done. It was not an apology because I

would have done it again. Their reaction was very positive and appreciative and our families stayed quite close for the years we lived as neighbors. They explained that they both been very tired from the moving, had a window air conditioner on, and had not heard the girl's crying.

One of the most memorable stories involved my mother and another black family named Woods. They had several children but one named Royal was the same age as my brother Willie and was a constant companion at our house, part of all the sports activity. Our family all attended Catholic schools which at that point were not integrated, nor were the public schools. All the black children had their own school, Willard Elementary. Royal wanted to go to school with Willie. But of course that was against the universal practice of segregation in the whole state of Indiana. But my mother approached Fr. Pratt at St Patricks and asked him if he would let Royal attend the school. The Woods family was not Catholic so that could have presented a double problem. But I'm sure my mother was persuasive and Fr. Pratt agreed to let Royal attend. Royal later became Catholic, as did his entire family. After graduation Royal went to a Catholic Seminary in Louisiana and studied for the priesthood.

I remember one Christmas season about 1928 when there was a knock on our front door and there stood a young black man, about 20, who began to speak to my mother in German. I saw my mother's reaction, at first no recognition then quickly realizing it was Royal Woods, home for a visit from the seminary. And my mother began to cry as they embraced. It was one of the most moving scenes I have observed in my life, still fresh in memory as a perfect picture of my mother. Royal was later ordained a catholic priest, the first catholic priest ever ordained in the State of Indiana. I remember attending, with our family, his first mass at St. Patricks.

My mother was always available for personal requests for help and I remember often when neighbors came to borrow money, especially during the depression. I don't remember her ever refusing a request. I presume most of the debts were paid but I am not sure since mom never made a point of that. The only time I do remember that a debt was paid was when Mrs.McClain, the negro neighbor repaid mom the dollar that she had borrowed the year before. And my mother could not recall that there was an unpaid debt. I believe that as far as my mother was concerned there never was an unpaid debt: you were you're brother's keeper. She constantly gave clothing to the poorer

neighbor who generally were black. I can never recall hearing her say a negative thing about another person. Mom kept active in all of her children's lives, even until their thirties and I remember her concern about my marriage when after three years we still did not have a child. Of course that concern evaporated when our first child, Cathy was born.

In between WW I and II mom kept sending packages to Germany, where many relatives were destitute. And about 1937, on a trip back from Canada we stopped by her niece Mary in New York City. Mary was one of the three children of my mother's sister whom she had brought over from Germany in 1923. Mary had a small girl about four but had recently been divorced from her husband. Mom, in her kindness, brought the girl Rosalind back to Kokomo to live with us until Mary could get her life back together again. About the time I started college my mother moved to Ft. Wayne to work at St. Joseph's Hospital and live with my sister Josie, I don't know what her original duties were but I remember that very soon her job was to help feed the most difficult patients. That was my mother. When she was 77 she had a bad fall as she walked to work at 5:30 one morning. She never recovered from the fall and it was in that period when I visited her (I was married, living in Wilmington, DE) and she filled in some of the unknown past that is related in this memoir. She could still recite long German poems from Goethe and Schiller that she had learned as a child. When she died some few months after my last visit my sister Josie was with her in the hospital room. As best I can, I will repeat what Josie, who was about the most unemotional, business like person I have ever known, said about my mother's death. Josie had just dozed off in my mother's room when she was suddenly awakened to a blinding light in the hospital room. When she went over to mom she was dead and Josie said she believed that the blinding light was associated with my mother's soul leaving the body. I thought of this story when some 47 years later Betty, our children's mother died on Easter Day and two days later there was an earthquake in Wilmington, with it's center, as best as could be measured, near the block of our house. I do believe God took special note of the passing of two of His Saints.

My mother spent much time with me those early years. She spoke often of her hope that brother Mick would be a priest and I would be a doctor. I suppose she read some characteristics into us that were apparent to her. I recall praying every day that she would live long enough to see both those dreams fulfilled and they were. I did not become a medical doctor but I did get my PhD in

chemistry. She used to remind me that if I had been born in Germany the Crown Prince would have seen to my education, as the seventh son born in a row. I recall one time when I was about fourteen and her looking at me and saying:" If you were a girl, right now the house would be flooded with boys chasing after you". I think perhaps she did miss some more female help raising the family. She used to use a large wall calendar to drill me with numbers. I recall only one time she seemed exasperated when I had trouble understanding a particular point she was trying to make. She was trying to explain to me how cog railways worked in the Alps. I was about four or five at the time and had little idea what a cog or gear was, let alone how it could pull a train up and down a mountain. She tried different ways to explain it but I still could not understand it and told her so.

I remember only one disciplining, though I'm sure I deserved more. I had made a batch of cracker sandwiches, using butter. But I didn't make just 4-6. I used the whole box. She was upset at my gluttony so she refused to let me have any of the crackers. But in general there was little need for her to issue commands or prohibitions because we knew instinctively what she approved of. I recall one Halloween when most of our family went to our sister Rose's house for a party. Rose on the sly gave me some wine to drink (I was probably about six) and when I came home I couldn't walk straight. Mom really got upset over that and let everyone know that she never wanted that done again. I think she was especially concerned about drinking alcohol, since when I last saw her before she died and for some reminiscences about pop she remarked: "He was a goodman, very bright with numbers, but often drank too much."

My mother is buried in Crown Point Cemetery in Kokomo, along with pop and his parents, plus pop's brother Charles who was known as "Chink". She died when I was 31, the same age as Chris was when his mother, our own mom died. Cathy was the only one of our children born at time and was two years old.

CHAPTER 17

My Siblings

There was 21years between the ages of my oldest brother Karl born in 1898 and myself in 1919. We were close enough that I remember them all still living at home .Rose was married first in 1924, Joe in 1925 and Karl in 1929. So my intimate, in-house memories of these three covers the shortest time span. Of course our lives were intertwined for many subsequent years. I remember

Rose most vividly because she always had a ready smile and sense of humor. One of the stories about her was that she was especially afraid of the Zigeuner (gypsies) who had our house targeted as an easy mark. Rose would always hide upstairs because gypsies had a reputation for stealing small children. Mom would always give them food, as she would always do for the many "Knights of the Road" who would stop by. Apparently both groups would leave chalk mark signals and signs to locate "easy" houses and ours was that. Since we lived only about a half dozen blocks from the railroad tracks such visits were common. There was another story about Rose, tod in-house, that when she first tried to shoot a bow and arrow, she turned it the wrong way and shot herself. If it happened it was not serious.

Rose worked as a clerk in Coady's grocery store which was about a mile away, toward town. It was there she met Cecil, whom she later married. She was a popular girl and had won a contest for "Miss Kokomo" that she said had a little ballot box stuffing by her current boy friend. She said later she had the choice to marry either for love or money and chose the latter. Cecil was by most standards quite wealthy, owned the Opalescent Glass Factory near the PPG, and was a widower with three children. His wife had died of TB which was a common, and generally fatal disease in those days. They had been living in Glendale, California at that time, where the company maintained sales offices. The children were "Bud" a boy about five, and two girls: Jane about seven and Cecile about nine. Right after the wedding Rose went with them to California and quickly contracted TB herself. She spent several of those early tears in a sanatorium in Denver Colorado, then later in a sanatorium called "The Irene Byrum Sanatorium" in Ft. Wayne, IN. Surprisingly Rose recovered enough from the disease to return home in Kokomo. Bud the son lived with them at home while the two girls attended a boarding school in Tipton, IN run by nuns, the Sisters of St. Joseph, who also ran the local Catholic schools and hospital.